

Secretary of Commerce Norm Mineta Remarks to the Ocean Exploration Panel Meeting August 21, 2000

Good morning fellow explorers

I say fellow explorers because I believe that each and every one of us is an explorer at heart. You just had the good sense to make it your life's work!

As space explorers observed over 30 years ago, Earth is a blue planet, an ocean planet.

And just as those early explorers set the nation's commitment to space exploration, it is up to us today to build a foundation for a renewed commitment to ocean exploration.

On June 12, President Clinton directed the Secretary of Commerce to put together a panel of America's finest explorers, scientists and educators.

He wanted the best people to work on a very, very important task: to develop a national strategy for ocean exploration.

I thank each of you for responding to the call.

Whenever we explore new frontiers – from the American west to outer space – we reap multiple benefits – to our economy, our technology, our health and our culture.

And, as we embark on this new era of ocean exploration, we can envision extraordinary benefits.

For example, the economic potential of America's unexplored oceans is vast. Gas hydrates may hold more than 1000 times the fuel in all other estimated oil and gas sources combined.

Already one new anti-cancer medicine (called Bryostatin) comes from a marine sponge. This drug is estimated to have an annual market value of over \$1.2 billion.

And there is more history under the sea than in all the museums of the world. The ocean is home for treasures of antiquity, sunken vessels and the legacy of our maritime past. And we have taken steps to protect this heritage.

The first national marine sanctuary protects the remains of the Civil War ironclad USS *Monitor*. The newest marine sanctuary -- the Thunder Bay National Marine Sanctuary -- will protect a collection of shipwrecks in Lake Huron.

It's been said, rightly, I believe, that we only protect that which we understand. By setting out on voyages of exploration and discovery, we build a foundation for conservation.

Technology is already bringing once inaccessible areas of the ocean within reach of fishermen, miners, and bio-prospectors.

In some ways, we are playing catch-up to these advances. But, as we have learned on land, protection must go hand in hand with exploration.

Deep ocean exploration presents huge technological challenges. And as we have seen with space exploration, the solutions often have broad benefits.

In turn, we will bring back discoveries of new life forms, geological features and chemical processes. Unraveling their mysteries will spur new developments. In the days of Lewis and Clark, Americans waited months to learn about their discoveries.

Today, through Internet and satellite communications, you can take us along. As many of you have shown, students and teachers can share in the excitement of planning and undertaking an expedition.

As President Clinton noted in calling for a new era of ocean exploration, America needs a sustained investment to reap the full benefits for society.

Exploration is not partisan, nor is it the exclusive domain of any agency. It requires the full participation of government and the private sector.

And, above all, a successful ocean exploration strategy must engage the public.

A truly successful report will give us a strategy to make all citizens explorers -- and move ocean issues beyond this esteemed panel here today.

The effort to reach out and bring the excitement of these endeavors into America's classrooms is one of the best investments we can make.

It is often said that children are natural scientists. This great exploration endeavor has the potential to spark and nurture that curiosity through film, television, and the Internet.

But let's also remember the adults out there – remember to reach out to the explorer in all of us.

Ask yourself: Where were you when man first walked on the moon?

That amazing event remains so vivid in our minds because all Americans, indeed the world, were able to see it live on TV.

That day inspired a whole new generation of explorers.

How will Americans be able to join you on your expeditions to new ocean frontiers? Will today's explorations inspire the next generation of ocean scientists – and at home explorers?

An ocean exploration strategy that reaches its full potential must tap all the expertise and resources available to us.

The exploration of the world's oceans cannot be accomplished by one government agency, nor can it be accomplished by government alone.

I urge you, in your deliberations, to envision a new collaboration among governments, academia, and the private industry that reaches out to everyone.

In addition, a successful ocean exploration strategy should explore through time.

Voyages to remote places are essential, but so are those that occur through time as well. The establishment of networks, observatories, and data arrays on the seafloor and in the ocean's water column often reveals more to science than a snapshot approach ever will.

Two hundred years after Lewis and Clark forever changed the American landscape, you can chart a new course to explore the American seascape.

My hope is that, with public outreach, future generations will view this commission as a turning point for exploration of the oceans.

Thank you all for your willingness to be part of this critical task for our future. I eagerly await your report.

May it mark a new era of ocean exploration and conservation – a new era of stewardship for the oceans.